Adverbial mimetics and lexical aspect

Previous research, Toritani (2007), has shown that Japanese verb phrases (VPs) are sensitive to the inherent aspectual properties of adverbial mimetic phrases (AMPs) and that AMP modification can affect VP lexical aspect. Thus, the unmodified VP (1) is understood as atelic whereas the AMP modified VP (2) is understood as telic. However, Toritani's analysis does not indicate why AMP modification should result in lexical aspectual shifts. I propose instead that analysis of AMP modification should be contextualized within an account of lexical aspect.

1. Mizu ga   nagareta.
   Water NOM   flow.PST
   'Water flowed.'

2. Mizu ga   zaaQ   to   nagareta.
   Water NOM   gush   ADV   flow.PST
   '(One burst of) water gushed.'

My proposed lexical classification system for Japanese is adapted from Olsen (1997) and defines three privative aspectual features: [+dynamic], [+durative], [+telic]. Crucially, only those aspectual properties lexicalized by the verb are considered when initially determining lexical aspectual classification - VP internal elements such as direct object noun phrases (DOs) are disregarded. Thus, activities and accomplishments form a single class with the verbs marked [+dynamic] and [+durative].

However, external elements such as direct object NPs can potentially add aspectual features. For example, adding *hon o nisatsu* 'two books' to *yomu* 'read' adds [+telic] in (3). In (4), however, the availability of multiple interpretations for *hon* 'a book/the book(s)/books,' indicates that [+telic], while available, is not necessarily added. Furthermore, the availability of multiple interpretations for *hon* (4) means that the VP is itself open to multiple interpretations, here an activity interpretation 'read books' and an accomplishment interpretation 'read a book/the book(s).'

3. Tomu wa   hon o   nisatsu   yonda.
   Tom   TOP book ACC two volumes read.PST
   'Tom read two books.'

4. Tomu wa   hon o   yonda.
   Tom   TOP book ACC read.PST
   'Tom read a book/the book(s)/books.'

Like DOs, AMPs can also potentially add aspectual features to VPs, e.g. in (2) addition of the AMP *zaaQ to* 'gush' means that [+telic] is added to the VP, narrowing the interpretations available to the VP and interfering with the availability of an atelic interpretation. Similarly, in (5), adding the AMP *marumaru* 'completely' also adds [+telic] to the VP and therefore interferes with the availability of the activity interpretation so that the VP is interpreted as an accomplishment.

5. Hazukashi   nagara, hon   o   marumaru   yonda   ato   demo   wakaranakatta
   Shy   while   book ACC   completely   read.PST after even   understand.NEG.PST
   'It's embarrassing that even after reading the book(s)/*books completely, I didn't understand.
   http://blog.livedoor.jp/ugoky/archives/52012122.html

In contrast, in (6) the DO *nisatsu no hon* 'two books' is already quantized so the VP must already be interpreted as an accomplishment. In this case, adding [+telic] via AMP modification by *marumaru* does not have an effect because the VP is already marked for the feature [+telic].

6. Hazukashi   nagara, nisatsu   no   hon o   marumaru yonda….
   Shy   while   two volume GEN   book ACC   completely read.PST….
   'It's embarrassing that [even after] reading two books completely…

In (7), as in (5), not only is *hon* open to multiple interpretations, the VP as a whole can be understood as either an activity or an accomplishment (though the activity interpretation is somewhat pragmatically unlikely). Addition of the AMP *batan* 'thud' results in the VP being marked with the feature [+telic], interfering with an activity interpretation for the VP. In contrast to (5), however, AMP modification by *batan* does not make any interpretation of the noun phrase *hon* unavailable in (8) and so represents a slightly different pattern of AMP modification.

7. Hon ga   taoreta
   Book NOM   fall.PST
   'A book/the book(s)/books fell.'

8. Hon ga   *batan to*   taoreta.
   Book NOM   thud ADV   fall.PST
   'A book/the book(s)/books fell with a thud.'

Olsen, Mari Broman. 1997. *A semantic and pragmatic model of lexical and grammatical aspect*.; Toratani, K. (2005). A cognitive approach to mimetic aspect in Japanese.